



# **Western Governors' Association**

*Restoring and Managing the Health of Forests in the West*  
Thursday, June 30, 2011  
Remarks by Gov. Jan Brewer

Thank you for this opportunity to share what we, in Arizona, have been suffering through for these past several months.

Some of you know what a wildfire can do.

The devastation is immense.

The destruction is vast.

And, the losses are great.

But, let me put our wildfire crisis in perspective:

The AVERAGE number of fires per year in Arizona is 3,228 wildfires -- averaging more than 180,000 acres.

For ALL of last year, Arizona had 1,582 wildfires -- which burned 85,015 acres.

However, so far THIS year, Arizona has had a total of 765 fires that have burned more than 923,000 acres -- or 1,442 SQUARE MILES.

That means more than 1 percent of the total land mass in Arizona has already burned in this fire season alone ... and the season is not yet over.

I've visited the fire areas and seen firsthand the destruction and devastation.

But, as with many tragedies, tough times bring out the best in people.

I was truly impressed by the way Arizonans came together to help their neighbors.

Over 40,000 fire fighters banded together to protect lives, homes, businesses, and Arizona's natural habitat.

On a given day during the height of the emergency, there have been between 6,000 and 10,000 wild-land firefighters in Arizona.

During this time, more than a thousand engines have been deployed.

Obviously, the fires that have ravaged Arizona will have both a SHORT term and LONG term impact.

Immediately, and, in the short term, we need to help people and businesses that have been dislocated.

Most of the fires are now reaching containment -- but they will not be put out completely until our "Monsoon" rains arrive.

And, when those rains DO arrive, they will bring flooding -- and we need to prepare for that as well.

Last year, after the Schultz fire near Flagstaff, we faced severe flooding. The lands that burned left no vegetation to hold the monsoon rains.

The Wallow -- Horseshoe Two -- and the Monument fires -- are in mountainous areas, and the potential flooding THERE will impact homes, businesses and habitat.

We need to learn from the Schultz fire.

The Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team's primary responsibility is public safety.

We know the burnt trees that pose a danger to roadways will be salvaged.

What we need is a process that will allow ALL of the other damaged trees that can and should be salvaged -- to be salvaged before they lose their value in a year or two.

The Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI) has allowed the wood products industry to begin to redevelop. Our concern is that given the destruction to their supply, we would lose this critical piece of our restoration puzzle.

We need to bring our best and brightest to the table to find solutions to re-vegetation to help fight post burn flooding.

For example, because seeding and mulching have had limited success on their own -- maybe we need to combine them.

These fires have destroyed some of the most beautiful parts of our state. It will take years for our forests to recover.

But, we KNOW what is needed:

- We will need the assistance of the federal government.

- We need access to salvage what timber we can and to plant new forests.

- We need streamlined and a consistent process across forests and other federal lands to allow states to recover.

- We need to better manage our forests to prevent this from happening again or at least to minimize the devastation.

Forest restoration or thinning is key to preventing these types of disasters.

A perfect example is Alpine, Arizona. The community was spared because it thinned the forest around it.

The flames roared right up to the area that was thinned and was knocked to the ground and contained by firefighters.

It is far more cost effective to do these kinds of restoration projects rather than paying to fight and treat the aftermath.

- And, finally, we need large-scale forest restoration. The Nature Conservancy estimates that 80 million acres of forest across the west are overgrown.

The stewardship contract in the Apache-Sitgreaves and the Four Forests Restoration Initiative are great examples of what CAN work.

Everybody was at the table and together came up with a solution – a community-based game plan, if you will.

The Restoration contract to be awarded in 4FRI's first phase will be the largest ever awarded by the Forest Service and will cover approximately 30,000 acres of restoration per year.

Unfortunately, Arizona has seen approximately 1 million acres burned so far this fire season. Do the math. We are way behind the curve -- and we are quickly losing opportunities to be pro-active.

So, we know what needs to be done.

Quite simply ... it's time to do it!

I call on the Western Governors to join with me in my call for more landscape scale restoration.

Given the budget constraints we all face, we need to engage the private sector to a greater degree.

We need them to make the investment facilities that can process more timber.

In closing, let me just say I know this investment isn't cheap.

But, in order to encourage it, we need to support longer term contracts or certainty that allows them to recoup their investment and employ the people in these devastated areas.

Thank you for allowing me to share these thoughts with you.